

ContraCostaTimes

OUR VIEW

We no longer can afford to procrastinate

The moment of truth for the California Delta is upon us. There is no escape. A state-federal commission is pushing relentlessly toward a plan to fix the Delta, a plan we will ultimately approve or reject. We could have an opportunity in November to authorize a down payment on the fix, perhaps to the tune of \$1 billion in bond financing.

Taking decisive action on water issues would be out of character for Californians, despite the fact that our futures are linked to a reliable water supply. The Delta is the state's most important source of water — supplying two of three Californians — but we are masters of procrastination when it comes to dealing with it.

Drought years bring rationing, fish kills, business constriction and a sense of crisis. Then a wet year comes along, the reservoirs fill

up, and we quickly plunge our heads in the damp sand. We assume that, somehow, everything will work out in the long run.

Our eyes glaze over when our leaders talk about water policy and the Delta. We dismiss as irrelevant the seemingly endless political and legal squabbles that have marked the history of water in this state.

Sure, Northern Californians get emotionally involved when we suspect our neighbors to the south are scheming to steal "our water." Otherwise, with the exception of a few special interest groups like farmers and environmentalists, the Delta remains lodged in our collective unconscious.

There is no question the Delta urgently needs our attention.

As this 20-page Times Special Report demonstrates, the Delta's ecosystem is terribly out of balance, its infrastructure is crumbling, and it

can't satisfy the mounting water needs of our state.

We turn away at our own peril. We can pay for the fix now, or we can pay later in ways too costly to calculate: jobs, farmland, natural habitat and lifestyle.

There is reason to believe we may be ready to act.

We have a fragile truce among the historic warring parties: farmers, industrial and urban users, environmentalists.

We have a state-federal commission, called CALFED, that is working on a plan to accommodate the competing interests without inflicting too much pain on any one group.

We have a governor and legislature that seem eager to back an appropriate compromise.

What remains to be seen is whether we care.

Without us, the Delta and all it sustains remain in peril.